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Bibliographic details for the Source Text

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The Rooming House Madrigals: Early Selected Poems, 1946-1966
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THE ROOMINGHOUSE MADRIGALS: EARLY SELECTED POEMS 1946-1966

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by Charles Bukowski
Flower, Fist and Bestial Wail (1960)
Longshot Pomes for Broke Players (1962)
Run with the Hunted (1962)
It Catches My Heart in Its Hands (1963)
Crucifix in a Deathhand (1965)
Cold Dogs in the Courtyard (1965)
Confessions of a Man Insane Enough to Live with Beasts (1965)
All the Assholes in the World and Mine (1966)
At Terror Street and Agony Way (1968)
Poems Written Before Jumping out of an 8 Story Window (1968)
Notes of a Dirty Old Man (1969)
The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills (1969)
Fire Station (1970)
Post Office (1971)
Mockingbird Wish Me Luck (1972)
Erections, Ejaculations, Exhibitions and General Tales of Ordinary Madness (1972)
South of No North (1973)
Factotum (1975)
Women (1978)
Play the Piano Drunk/Like a Percussion Instrument/ Until the Fingers Begin to Bleed a Bit (1979)
Dangling in the Tournefortia (1981)
Ham on Rye (1982)
Bring Me Your Love (1983)
Hot Water Music (1983)
There's No Business (1984)
You Get So Alone at Times That It Just Makes Sense (1986)
The Movie: "Barfly" (1987)
The Last Night of the Earth Poems (1992)
Run with the Hunted: A Charles Bukowski Reader (1993)
Pulp (1994)
Shakespeare Never Did This (augmented edition) (1995)

Preface
Grateful acknowledgement is given to the editors of the scores of literary magazines and chapbooks where many of these poems originally appeared. Thanks also to Chris Brun, Special Collections Librarian at the University of California, Santa Barbara for his cooperation. And finally, thanks to Michael J.
Foreword
A question put to me quite often is, "Why do your out-of-print books cost so much?" Well, they cost so much because that's what booksellers can get for them from collectors.
"I want to read your early poems but ..."
I don't even have some of my early books. Most of them were stolen by people I drank with. When I'd go to the bathroom, they did their shit. It only reinforced my general opinion of humanity. And caused me to drink with fewer people. At first, I made efforts to replace these books, and did, but when they were stolen all over again I stopped the replacement process and more and more drank alone.
Anyhow, what follows are what we consider to be the best of the early poems. Some are taken from the first few books; others were not in books but have been taken from obscure magazines of long ago.
The early poems are more lyrical than where I am at now. I like these poems but I disagree with some who claim, "Bukowski's early work was much better." Some have made these claims in critical reviews, others in parlors of gossip.
Now the reader can make his own judgment, first hand.
In my present poetry, I go at matters more directly, land on them and then get out. I don't believe that my early methods and my late methods are either inferior or superior to one another. They are different, that's all.
Yet, re-reading these, there remains a certain fondness for that time. Coming in from the factory or warehouse, tired enough, there seemed little use for the night except to eat, sleep and then return to the menial job. But there was the typewriter waiting for me in those many old rooms with torn shades and worn rugs, the tub and toilet down the hall, and the feeling in the air of all the losers who had preceded me. Sometimes the typewriter was there when the job wasn't and the food wasn't and the rent wasn't. Sometimes the typer was in hock. Sometimes there was only the park bench. But at the best of times there was the small room and the machine and the bottle. The sound of the keys, on and on, and shouts: "HEY! KNOCK

IT OFF, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE! WE'RE WORKING PEOPLE HERE AND WE'VE GOT TO GET UP IN
THE MORNING!" With broomsticks knocking on the floor, pounding coming from the ceiling, I would work in a last few lines....
I was not Hamsun eating his own flesh in order to continue writing but I had a fair amount of travail. The poems were sent out as written on first impulse, no line or word changes. I never revised or retyped. To eliminate an error, I would simply go over it thus: ############ and go on with the line. One magazine editor printed a group of my poems with all the ############ intact.
At any rate, here are many of the poems from that wondrous and crazy time, from those distant hours. The room steamed with smoke, dizzied with fumes, we gambled. I hope they work for you. And if they don't, well, #### ## ###.

Charles Bukowski
San Pedro, 10-31-87


1 night has come like something crawling
2 up the bannister, sticking out its tongue
3 of fire, and I remember the
4 missionaries up to their knees in muck
5 retreating across the beautiful blue river
6 and the machine gun slugs flicking spots of
7 fountain and Jones drunk on the shore
8 saying shit shit these Indians
9 where'd they get the fire power?
10 and I went in to see Maria
11 and she said, do you think they'll attack,
12 do you think they'll come across the river?
13 afraid to die? I asked her, and she said
14 who isn't?
15 and I went to the medicine cabinet
16 and poured a tall glassful, and I said
17 we've made 22,000 dollars in 3 months building roads
18 for Jones and you have to die a little
19 to make it that fast ... Do you think the communists
20 started this? she asked, do you think it's the communists?
21 and I said, will you stop being a neurotic bitch.
22 these small countries rise because they are getting
23 their pockets filled from both sides ... and she
24 looked at me with that beautiful schoolgirl idiocy
25 and she walked out, it was getting dark but I let her go,
26 you've got to know when to let a woman go if you want to
27 keep her,
28 and if you don't want to keep her you let her go anyhow,
29 so it's always a process of letting go, one way or the other,
30 so I sat there and put the drink down and made another
31 and I thought, whoever thought an engineering course at Old Miss
32 would bring you where the lamps swing slowly
33 in the green of some far night?
and Jones came in with his arm around her blue waist
and she had been drinking too, and I walked up and said,

man and wife? and that made her angry for if a woman can't
get you by the nuts and squeeze, she's done,
and I poured another tall one, and
I said, you 2 may not realize it
but we're not going to get out of here alive.

we drank the rest of the night.
you could hear, if you were real still,
the water coming down between the god trees,
and the roads we had built
you could hear animals crossing them
and the Indians, savage fools with some savage cross to bear.
and finally there was the last look in the mirror
as the drunken lovers hugged
and I walked out and lifted a piece of straw
from the roof of the hut
then snapped the lighter, and I
watched the flames crawl, like hungry mice
up the thin brown stalks, it was slow but it was
real, and then not real, something like an opera,
and then I walked down toward the machine gun sounds,
the same river, and the moon looked across at me
and in the path I saw a small snake, just a small one,
looked like a rattler, but it couldn't be a rattler,
and it was scared seeing me, and I grabbed it behind the neck
before it could coil and I held it then
its little body curled around my wrist
like a finger of love and all the trees looked with eyes
and I put my mouth to its mouth
and love was lightning and remembrance,
dead communists, dead fascists, dead democrats, dead gods and
back in what was left of the hut Jones
had his dead black arm around her dead blue waist.
the cannoneer is dead,
and all the troops;

the conceited drummer boy
dumber than the tombs
lies in a net of red;

and under leaves, bugs twitch antennae
deciding which way to move
under the cool umbrella of decay;

the wind rills down like thin water
and searches under clothing,
sifting and sorry;

... clothing anchored with heavy bones
in noonday sleep
like men gone down on ladders, resting;

yet an hour ago
tree-shadow and man-shadow
showed their outline against the sun---

yet now, not a man amongst them
can single out the reason
that moved them down toward nothing;

and I think mostly of some woman far off
arranging important jars on some second shelf
and humming a dry, sun-lit tune.
outside, the quick storm turns the night slowly
backwards
and sends it shifting to old shores,
and everywhere are bones ... rib bones and light,
and grass, grass leaning left;
and we hump our backs against the wet like living things,
and this one with me now
holds my yearning like a packet
slips it into her purse with her powders and potions
pulls up a sheer stocking, chatters, touches her hair:
it's raining, oh damn it all, it's raining!
and on the battlefield the rocks are wet and cool,
the fine grains of rock glint moon-fire,
and she curses under a small green hat
like a crown
and walks like a gawky marionette
into the strings of rain.


(Dear Sir: Although we realize it is insufficient payment for your poems, you will receive 4 contributor's copies, which we will mail directly to you or to anyone you wish.---Note from the Editor.)

well, ya better mail one to M.S. or she'll prob.
put her pisser in the oven, she thinks she is hot
stuff, and mabe she is, I sure as hell wd't
know
then there is C.W. who does not answer his mail
but is very busy teaching young boys how to write
and I know he is going places, and since he is,
ya better mail 'm one ...
then there's my old aunt in Palm Springs nothing but money and I have
everything but money ... talent, a good singing voice,
a left hook deep to the gut ... send her a copy,
she hung up on me, last time I phoned her drunk,
giving evidence of need, she hung up
then there's this girl in Sacramento who
writes me these little letters ... very depressed
bitch, mixed and beaten like some waffle, making
gentle intellectual overtures which I ignore,
but send her a magazine
in lieu of a hot poker.

that makes 4?
I hope to send you some more poems
soon because I figure that
people who print my poems are a little
mad, but that's all right. I am also
that way. anyhow---

I hope
meanwhile
you do not fold up
before
I
do.
c.b.


I did not know
that the Mexicans
did this:
the bull
had been brave
and now
they dragged him
dead
around the ring
by his
tail,
a brave bull
dead,
but not just another bull,
this was a special
bull,
and to me
a special
lesson ...
and although Brahms
stole his First from Beethoven's 9th.
and although
the bull was dead
his head and his horns and
his insides dead,
he had been better than Brahms,
as good as Beethoven,
and

as we walked out
the sound and meaning of him
kept crawling up my arms
and although people bumped me and stepped on my toes
the bull burned within me
my candle of jesus,
dragged by his tail
he had nothing to do having done it all,
and through the long tunnels and minatory glances,
the elbows and feet and eyes, I prayed for California,
and the dead bull in man
and in me,
and I clasped my hands deep within my pockets, seized darkness,
and moved on.

1 but who died here;
2 and it's not when
3 but how;
4 it's not
5 the known great
6 but the great who died unknown;
7 it's not
8 the history
9 of countries
10 but the lives of men.

11 fables are dreams,
12 not lies,
13 and
14 truth changes
15 as
16 men change,
17 and when truth becomes stable
18 men
19 will
20 become dead
21 and
22 the insect
23 and the fire and
24 the flood
25 will become
26 truth.

ah, christ, what a CREW:
more
poetry, always more
P  O  E  T  R  Y .

if it doesn't come, coax it out with a
laxative. get your name in LIGHTS,
get it up there in
8½ × 11 mimeo.

keep it coming like a miracle.

ah christ, writers are the most sickening
of all the louts!
yellow-toothed, slump-shouldered,
gutless, flea-bitten and
obvious ... in tinker-toy rooms
with their flabby hearts
they tell us
what's wrong with the world---
as if we didn't know that a cop's club
can crack the head
and that war is a dirtier game than
marriage ...
or down in a basement bar
hiding from a wife who doesn't appreciate him
and children he doesn't
want
he tells us that his heart is drowning in
vomit. hell, all our hearts are drowning in vomit,
in pork salt, in bad verse, in soggy
love.
but he thinks he's alone and
he thinks he's special and he thinks he's Rimbaud

and he thinks he's
Pound.

and death! how about death? did you know
that we all have to die? even Keats died, even
Milton!
and D. Thomas---THEY KILLED HIM, of course.
Thomas didn't want all those free drinks
all that free pussy---
they ... FORCED IT ON HIM
when they should have left him alone so he could
write write WRITE!

poets.

and there's another
type. I've met them at their country
places (don't ask me what I was doing there because
I don't know).

they were born with money and
they don't have to dirty their hands in
slaughterhouses or washing
dishes in grease joints or
driving cabs or pimping or selling pot.

this gives them time to understand
Life.

they walk in with their cocktail glass
held about heart high
and when they drink they just
sip.

you are drinking green beer which you
brought with you
because you have found out through the years
that rich bastards are tight---

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they use 5 cent stamps instead of airmail
they promise to have all sorts of goodies ready
upon your arrival
from gallons of whiskey to
50 cent cigars. but it's never
there.
and they HIDE their women from you---
their wives, x-wives, daughters, maids, so forth,
because they've read your poems and
figure all you want to do is fuck everybody and
everything, which once might have been
true but is no longer quite
true.

and---
he WRITES TOO.
POETRY, of
course. everybody
writes
poetry.

he has plenty of time and a
postoffice box in town
and he drives there 3 or 4 times a day
looking and hoping for accepted
poems.

he thinks that poverty is a weakness of the
soul.

he thinks your mind is ill because you are
drunk all the time and have to work in a
factory 10 or 12 hours a
night.

he brings his wife in, a beauty, stolen from a
poorer rich
man.

he lets you gaze for 30 seconds
then hustles her
out. she has been crying for some
reason.

you've got 3 or 4 days to linger in the
guesthouse he says,
"come on over to dinner
sometime."
but he doesn't say when or
where. and then you find that you are not even
IN HIS HOUSE.

you are in ONE of his houses but his house is somewhere else--- you don't know where.

he even has x-wives in some of his houses.

his main concern is to keep his x-wives away from you. he doesn't want to give up a damn thing. and you can't blame him: his x-wives are all young, stolen, kept, talented, well-dressed, schooled, with varying French-German accents.

and!: they WRITE POETRY TOO. or PAINT. or fuck.

but his big problem is to get down to that mail box in town to get back his rejected poems

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and to keep his eye on all the other mail boxes in all his other houses.

meanwhile, the starving Indians sell beads and baskets in the streets of the small desert town.

the Indians are not allowed in his houses not so much because they are a fuck-threat but because they are dirty and ignorant. dirty? I look down at my shirt
with the beerstain on the front.
ignorant? I light a 6 cent cigar and
forget about it.

he or they or somebody was supposed to meet me at
the train station.

of course, they weren't there. "We'll be there to meet the great Poet!"

well, I looked around and didn't see any great poet. besides it was 7 a.m. and
40 degrees. those things happen. the trouble was there were no bars open. nothing open. not even a jail.

he's a poet.
he's also a doctor, a head-shrinker.
no blood involved that way. he won't tell me whether I am crazy or not---I don't have the money.

he walks out with his cocktail glass disappears for 2 hours, 3 hours, then suddenly comes walking back in unannounced with the same cocktail glass to make sure I haven't gotten hold of something more precious than Life itself.

my cheap green beer is killing me. he shows heart (hurrah) and gives me a little pill that stops my gagging.

but nothing decent to
he'd bought a small 6 pack
for my arrival but that was gone in an
hour and 15
minutes.

"I'll buy you barrels of beer," he had
said.

I used his phone (one of his phones)
to get deliveries of beer and
cheap whiskey. the town was ten miles away,
downhill. I peeled my poor dollars from my poor
roll. and the boy needed a tip, of
course.

the way it was shaping up I could see that I was
hardly Dylan Thomas yet, not even
Robert Creeley. certainly Creeley wouldn't have
had beerstains on his
shirt.

anyhow, when I finally got hold of one of his
x-wives I was too drunk to
make it.

scared too. sure, I imagined him peering
through the window---
he didn't want to give up a damn thing---
and
leveling the luger while I was
working
while "The March to the Gallows" was playing over
the Muzak
and shooting me in the ass first and
my poor brain
later.

"an intruder," I could hear him telling them,
"ravishing one of my helpless x-wives."

I see him published in some of the magazines now. not very good stuff.

a poem about me too: the Polack.

down with the Polack. the Polack whines too much. the Polack whines about his country, other countries, all countries, the Polack works overtime in a factory like a fool, among other fools with "pre-drained spirits."

down with the Polack drinks seas of green beer full of acid. the Polack has an ulcerated hemorrhoid. the Polack picks on fags "fragile fags." the Polack hates his wife, hates his daughter. his daughter will become an alcoholic, a prostitute. the Polack has an "obese burned out wife." the Polack has a spastic gut. the Polack has a "rectal brain."

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thank you, Doctor (and poet). any charge for this? I know I still owe you for the pill.

Your poem is not too good but at least I got your starch up. most of your stuff is about as lively as a beachball. but it is your round, you've won a round. going to invite me out this Summer? I might scrape up trainfare. got an Indian friend who'd like to meet you and yours. he swears he's got the biggest pecker in the state of California.

and guess what? he writes POETRY too!

1 To end up alone
2 in a tomb of a room
3 without cigarettes
4 or wine---
5 just a lightbulb
6 and a potbelly,
7 grayhaired,
8 and glad to have
9 the room.

10 ... in the morning
11 they're out there
12 making money:
13 judges, carpenters,
14 plumbers, doctors,
15 newsboys, policemen,
16 barbers, carwashers,
17 dentists, florists,
18 waitresses, cooks,
19 cabdrivers ... 

20 and you turn over
21 to your left side
22 to get the sun
23 on your back
24 and out
25 of your eyes.

Bukowski, Charles: The Genius of the Crowd [from The Rooming House Madrigals:}
There is enough treachery, hatred, violence, Absurdity in the average human being
To supply any given army on any given day.
AND The Best At Murder Are Those Who Preach Against It.
AND The Best At Hate Are Those Who Preach LOVE
AND THE BEST AT WAR ---FINALLY---ARE THOSE WHO PREACH PEACE
Those Who Preach GOD NEED God
Those Who Preach PEACE Do Not Have Peace.
THOSE WHO PREACH LOVE DO NOT HAVE LOVE
BEWARE THE PREACHERS Beware The Knowers.
Beware Those Who Either Detest Poverty Or Are Proud Of It
BEWARE Those Quick To Praise For They Need PRAISE In Return
BEWARE Those Quick To Censure:
They Are Afraid Of What They Do
Not Know
Beware Those Who Seek Constant Crowds; They Are Nothing Alone

Beware The Average Man The Average Woman BEWARE Their Love

Their Love Is Average, Seeks Average But There Is Genius In Their Hatred There Is Enough Genius In Their Hatred To Kill You, To Kill Anybody.

Not Wanting Solitude Not Understanding Solitude They Will Attempt To Destroy Anything That Differs From Their Own

Not Being Able To Create Art They Will Not Understand Art

They Will Consider Their Failure As Creators Only As A Failure Of The World

Not Being Able To Love Fully They Will BELIEVE Your Love Incomplete AND THEN THEY WILL HATE YOU

And Their Hatred Will Be Perfect Like A Shining Diamond Like A Knife
the fields rattle
with red birds;
it is 4:30 in
the morning,
it is always
4:30 in the morning,
and I listen for
my friends:
the garbagemen
and the thieves,
and cats dreaming
red birds
and red birds dreaming
worms,
and worms dreaming
along the bones of
my love,
and I cannot sleep,
and soon morning will come,
the workers will rise,
and they will look for me
at the docks,
and they will say,
"he is drunk again,"
but I will be asleep,
finally,
among the bottles and
sunlight,
all darkness gone,
my arms spread like
a cross,
the red birds
flying,
flies opening in the smoke,
and
like something stabbed and
healing,
like
40 pages through a bad novel,
a smile upon
my idiot's face.

man shot through back while
holding robes of a young priest
who looks like a woman,
and here we hang:
moon-bright
neatly gloved,
motorcycles everywhere, bees asleep,
nozzles rusted,
climate awry,
and we shake our bones,
blind skin there,
and the soldier falls dead,
another dead soldier,
the black robe of a young priest
who looks like a woman
is now beautifully red,
and the tanks
come on through.

1 bird-dream and peeling wallpaper
2 symptoms of grey sleep
3 and at 4 a.m. Whitey came out of his room
4 (the solace of the poor is in numbers
5 like Summer poppies)
6 and he began to scream help me! help me! help me!
7 (an old man with hair as white as any ivory tusk)
8 and he was vomiting blood
9 help me help me help me
10 and I helped him lie down in the hall
11 and I beat on the landlady's door
12 (she is as French as the best wine but as tough as
13 an American steak) and
14 I hollered her name, Marcella! Marcella!
15 (the milkman would soon be coming with his
16 pure white bottles like chilled lilies)
17 Marcella! Marcella! help me help me help me,
18 and she screamed back through the door:
19 you polack bastard, are you drunk again? then
20 Promethean the eye at the door
21 and she
22 sized up the red river in her rectangular brain
23 (oh, I am nothing but a drunken polack
24 a bad pinch-hitter a writer of letters to the newspapers)
25 and she spoke into the phone like a lady ordering bread and
26 eggs,
27 and I held to the wall
28 dreaming bad poems and my own death
29 and the men came ... one with a cigar, the other needing a
30 shave,
31 and they made him stand up and walk down the steps
32 his ivory head on fire (Whitey, my drinking pal---
33 all the songs, Sing Gypsy, Laugh Gypsy, talk about
34 the war, the fights, the good whores,
35 skid-row hotels floating in wine,

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36 floating in crazy talk,
37 cheap cigars and anger
38 and the siren took him away, except the red part
39 and I began to vomit and the French wolverine screamed
40 you'll have to clean it up, all of it, you and Whitey!
41 and the steamers sailed and rich men on yachts
42 kissed girls young enough to be their daughters,
43 and the milkman came by and stared
44 and the neon lights blinked selling something
tires or oil or underwear
and she slammed her door and I was alone
ashamed
it was the war, the war forever, the war was never over,
and I cried against the peeling walls,
the weakness of our bones, our sotted half-brains,
and morning began to creep into the hall---
toilets flushed, there was bacon, there was coffee,
there were hangovers, and I too
went in and closed my door and sat down and waited for the
sun.


O lord, he said, Japanese women,
real women, they have not forgotten,
bowing and smiling
closing the wounds men have made;
but American women will kill you like they
tear a lampshade,
American women care less than a dime,
they've gotten derailed,
they're too nervous to make good:
always scowling, belly-aching,
disillusioned, overwrought;
but oh lord, say, the Japanese women:
there was this one,
I came home and the door was locked
and when I broke in she broke out the bread knife
and chased me under the bed
and her sister came
and they kept me under that bed for two days,
and when I came out, at last,
she didn't mention attorneys,
just said, you will never wrong me again,
and I didn't; but she died on me,
and dying, said, you can wrong me now,
and I did,
but you know, I felt worse then
than when she was living;
there was no voice, no knife,
nothing but little Japanese prints on the wall,
all those tiny people sitting by red rivers
with flying green birds,
and I took them down and put them face down
in a drawer with my shirts,
and it was the first time I realized
that she was dead, even though I buried her;
and some day I'll take them all out again,

all the tan-faced little people
sitting happily by their bridges and huts
and mountains---
but not right now,
not just yet.

due to weekend conditions, and although there's
too much smog, everything's jammed
and it's worse than masts down in a storm
you can't go anywhere
and if you do, they are all staring through glass windows
or waiting for dinner, and no matter how bad it is
(not the glass, the dinner)
they'll spend more time talking about it
than eating it,
and that's why my wife got rid of me:
I was a boor and didn't know when to smile
or rather (worse) I did,
but didn't, and one afternoon
with people diving into pools
and playing cards
and watching carefully shaven T.V. comedians
in starched white shirts and fine neckties
kidding about what the world had done to them,
I pretended a headache
and they gave me the young lady's bedroom
(she was about 17)
and hell, I crawled beneath her sheets
and pretended to sleep
but everybody knew I was a cornered fake,
but I tried all sorts of tricks---
I tried to think of Wilde behind bars,
but Wilde was dead;
I tried to think of Hem shooting a lion
or walking down Paris streets
medallioned with his wild buddies,
the whores swooning to their beautiful knees,
but all I did was twist within her young sheets,
and from the headboard, shaking in my nervous storm,
several trinkets fell upon me---
elephants, glass dogs with seductive stares,

a young boy and girl carrying a pail of water,
but nothing by Bach or conducted by Ormandy,
and I finally gave it up, went into the john
and tried to piss (I knew I would be constipated
for a week), and then I walked out,
and my wife, a reader of Plato and e.e. cummings
ran up and said, "oooh, you should have seen
BooBoo at the pool! He turned backflips and sideflips
and it was the funniest thing you've
EVER seen!"

I think it was not much later that the man came
to our third floor apartment
about seven in the morning
and handed me a summons for divorce,
and I went back to bed with her and said,
don't worry, it's all right, and
she began to cry cry cry,
I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry,
and I said, please stop,
remember your heart.

but that morning when she left
about 8 o'clock she looked
the same as ever, maybe even better.
I didn't even bother to shave;
I called in sick and went down
to the corner bar.

1 and the next I remembered I'm on a table,
2 everybody's gone: the head of bravery
3 under light, scowling, flailing me down ...
4 and then some toad stood there, smoking a cigar:
5 "Kid you're no fighter," he told me,
6 and I got up and knocked him over a chair;
7 it was like a scene in a movie, and
8 he stayed there on his big rump and said
9 over and over: "Jesus, Jesus, whatsamatta wit
10 you?" and I got up and dressed,
11 the tape still on my hands, and when I got home
12 I tore the tape off my hands and
13 wrote my first poem,
14 and I've been fighting
15 ever since.

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1 at the sea at the beach in the dark there was somebody
2 sitting in a car along the shore and playing this drum
3 as if in Africa and the cops rode by on the sidewalk
4 and I went down to the disappointing sea
5 and saw two blue lights in the water and a boat
6 and a man walked by in a white shirt and squatted by the
7 shore and got up and walked along the shore
8 and then another man came and followed him:
9 they both walked along the shore by the water
10 one 12 feet behind the other and I watched them until
11 they disappeared and then I got up and walked through
12 the sand to the cement and through a bar door I saw a
13 negro singing with a light on his face
14 he wailed a strange song and the sound of the song twisted
15 in the air and everything was empty and dry and easy
16 and I got into my car and drove back to the hot city
17 but I knew I would always remember the time
18 and the catch of it---the way the night hung undisturbed
with people walking on it like some quiet rug
and a small boat rocking bravely by bulldogging water
and the colored pier lights like a broken mind sick in the sea.


the legs are gone and the hopes---the lava of outpouring,
and I haven't shaved in sixteen days
but the mailman still makes his rounds and
water still comes out of the faucet and I have a photo of
myself with glazed and milky eyes full of simple music
in golden trunks and 12 oz. gloves when I made the semi-finals
only to be taken out by a German brute who should have been
locked in a cage for the insane and allowed to drink blood.
Now I am insane and stare at the wallpaper as one would stare
at a Cézanne or an early Picasso (he has lost it), and I sent out
the girls for beer, the old girls who barely bother to wipe
their asses and say, well, I guess I won't comb my hair today:
it might bring me luck! well, anyway, they wash the dishes and
chop the wood, and the landlady keeps saying let me in, I can't
get in, you've got the lock on, and what's all that singing and
cussing in there? but she only wants a piece of ass, she pretends
she wants the rent
but she's not gonna get either one of 'em.
meanwhile the skulls of the dead are full of beetles and
old football scores like S.C. 16, N.D. 14 on a John Baker field goal.

I can see the fleet from my window, the sails and the guns,
always
the guns poking their eyes in the sky looking for trouble like
young
L.A. cops who haven't yet shaved and the young sailors out
there sex-hungry, trying to act tough, trying to act like men
but really closer to their mother's nipples than to a true evalu-
ation of existence. I say, god damn it, that
the legs are gone and the outpourings too. inside my brain
rats snip and snipe and
pour oil
to burn and fire out early dreams.
darling, says one of the girls, you've got to snap out of it,

we're running out of MONEY. how do you want
your toast?  light or dark?
a woman's a woman, I say, and I put my binoculars between
her kneecaps and I can see where empires have fallen.

I wish I had a brush, some paint, some paint and a brush, I say.

why? asks one of the whores

BECAUSE RATS DON'T LIKE OIL! I scream.

(I can't do it. I don't belong here. I listen to radio programs
and people's voices and I marvel that they can get excited
and interested over nothing) and I flick out the lights, I
crash out the lights, and I pull the shades down, I
tear the shades down as I light my last cigar
then dream jump from the Empire State Building
into the thickheaded bullbrained mob with the hard-on attitude;
already forgotten the dead of Normandy, Lincoln's stringy
beard,
all the bulls that have died to flashing red capes,
all the love that has died in women and men
while fools have been elevated to the trumpet's succulent sneer
and I have fought (red-handed and drunk
in slop-pitted alleys)
the bartenders of this rotten land.

and I laugh, I can still laugh, who can't laugh when the whole
thing
is so ridiculous
that only the insane, the clowns, the half-wits,
the cheaters, the whores, the horseplayers, the bankrobbers, the
poets ... are interesting?
in the dark I hear hands reaching for the last of my money
like mice nibbling at paper, automatic, while I slumber,
a false drunken God asleep at the wheel ...

a quarter rolls across the floor, and I remember all the faces and
the football heroes, and everything has meaning, and an editor
writes me, you are good

but

you are too emotional

the way to whip life is to quietly frame the agony,

study it and put it to sleep in the abstract.

is there anything less abstract

than dying everyday and

on the last day?

the door closes and the last of the great whores are gone
and they are all great, somehow no matter how they have
killed me, they are great, and I smoke quietly
thinking of Mexico, of the decaying horses and dead bulls,
of Havana and Spain and Normandy, of the jabbering insane,
of the Kamikaze
winning whether they lived or died,
of my dead friends, of no more friends
ever; and the voice of my Mexican buddy saying, you won't die
you won't die in this war, you're too smart, you'll take care
of yourself.

I keep thinking of the bulls. the rotting bulls, dying everyday.
the whores are gone. the shells have stopped for a minute.

fuck everybody.

All I know is this: the ravens kiss my mouth,
the veins are tangled here,
the sea is made of blood.

All I know is this: the hands reaching out,
my eyes are closed, my ears are closed,
the sky rejects my scream.

All I know is this: my nostrils drip with dreams
the hounds lap us up, the fools laugh out,
the clock ticks out the dead.

All I know is this: my feet are sorrow here,
my words are less than lilies, my words are clotted now:
the ravens kiss my mouth.


they talk down through
the centuries to us,
and this we need more and more,
the statues and paintings
in midnight age
as we go along
holding dead hands.

and we would say
rather than delude the unknowing:
a damn good show,
but hardly enough for a horse to eat,
and out on the sunshine street where
eyes are dabbled in metazoan faces
I decide again
that in these centuries
they have done very well
considering the nature of their
18 brothers:
19 it's more than good
20 that some of them,
21 (closer really to field-mouse than
22 falcon)
23 have been bold enough to try.


1 and the hedges wet in the rain, flaking in a sheet of wind,
2 and for a moment everything working: rusty bells, April
3 birds, unblushing brides, anything you can name that has not
died, so exactly, and even the wind like a lover's hand,
5 a somehow important wind, something too like sleep or slain
6 enemies,
7 and the feet move through paths not restricted by the
8 bull-goaded mind,
9 and see---all and everywhere---hedges in the rain
10 like great cathedrals now, new Caesars, cats walking,
11 new gods without plug or wire, love without wasps,
12 new Christians, bulls, Romes, new new leaves, new rain
13 now splashing through the fire; and I close the door, old room,
14 I fall upon the couch, I sweat
15 and I cough I cough small words
16 lions bearing down through coffee cups and puddles, I
17 sigh, Cleopatra. Not for either of us, but for the rest.


1 Making love in the sun, in the morning sun
2 in a hotel room
3 above the alley
4 where poor men poke for bottles;
making love in the sun
making love by a carpet redder than our blood,
making love while the boys sell headlines
and Cadillacs,
making love by a photograph of Paris
and an open pack of Chesterfields,
making love while other men---poor fools---
work.

That moment---to this ...
may be years in the way they measure,
but it's only one sentence back in my mind---
there are so many days
when living stops and pulls up and sits
and waits like a train on the rails.
I pass the hotel at 8
and at 5; there are cats in the alleys
and bottles and bums,
and I look up at the window and think,
I no longer know where you are,
and I walk on and wonder where
the living goes
when it stops.


the dirty dogs of Egypt stride down my bones
the cat goes home in the morning
and I think of agony when there's little else to
do, and there's usually little else to do
except think the agony might kill us---
but, perhaps, what really saves us from it
is our being able to luxuriate in it---
like an old lady putting on a red hat.

yet my walls are stained where broken glass has
pissed its liquor.
I see agony in a box of kitchen soap
and the walls want their flatness to be my
flatness, o the dirty dogs of Egypt,
I see flatirons hanging from hooks
the eagle is a canary in the breakfastnook
eating dry seed and cramped by the dream.

I want so much that is not here and do not know
where to go.

this thing upon me is not death
but it's as real
and as landlords full of maggots
pound for rent
I eat walnuts in the sheath
of my privacy
and listen for more important
drummers;
it's as real, it's as real
as the broken-boned sparrow
cat-mouthed, uttering
more than mere
miserable argument;
between my toes I stare
at clouds, at seas of gaunt
sepulcher ...
and scratch my back
and form a vowel
as all my lovely women
(wives and lovers)
break like engines
into steam of sorrow
to be blown into eclipse;
bone is bone
but this thing upon me
as I tear the window shades
and walk caged rugs,
this thing upon me
like a flower and a feast,
believe me
is not death and is not
glory
and like Quixote's windmills
makes a foe
turned by the heavens

against one man;
... this thing upon me,
great god,
this thing upon me
crawling like a snake,
terrifying my love of commonness,
some call Art
some call Poetry;
it's not death
but dying will solve its power
and as my grey hands
drop a last desperate pen
in some cheap room
they will find me there
and never know
my name
my meaning
nor the treasure
of my escape.

all the beer was poisoned and the capt. went down
and the mate and the cook
and we had nobody to grab sail
and the N.wester ripped the sheets like toenails
and we pitched like crazy
the hull tearing its sides
and all the time in the corner
some punk had a drunken slut (my wife)
and was pumping away
like nothing was happening
and the cat kept looking at me
and crawling in the pantry
amongst the clanking dishes
with flowers and vines painted on them
until I couldn't stand it anymore
and took the thing
and heaved it
over
the side.


listen, I went to get a haircut, it was a perfectly good day
until they brought it to me, I mean I sat waiting my turn in the
chair and I found a magazine---the usual thing: women with their
breasts hanging out, etc., and then I turned the page and here
were photos of Orientals in a field, there was a big bastard with the sword---the caption said he had a very good
swing, plenty of power and the picture showed him getting ready
with the sword, and you saw an Oriental kneeling there with his
eyes closed, then---ZIP!----he was kneeling there without a head
and you could see the neck clean, not yet even
spurting blood, the separation having been so astonishingly
swift, and more photos of beheadings, and then a photo of these
heads lolling in the weeds without bodies, the sun shining on
them.
and the heads looking still almost alive as if they hadn't
accepted the death---and then the barber said
next!

and I walked over to the chair and my head was still on
and his head said to my head,
how do you want it?
and I said, medium.

and he seemed like a nice sensible fellow
and it seemed nice to be near nice sensible fellows
and I wanted to ask him about the heads
but I thought it would upset him
or maybe even give him ideas
or he might say something that wouldn't help at
all
so I kept quiet.

I listened to him cut my hair
and he began talking about his baby
and I tried to concentrate on his
baby, it seemed very sane and logical
but I still kept thinking about the
heads.

when he finished the cutting
he turned me in the chair so I could look into the
mirror. my head was still on.

fine, I told him, and I got out of the chair, paid, and
gave him a good tip.

I walked outside and a woman walked by and she had her
head on and all the people driving cars had their heads
on.

I should have concentrated on the breasts, I thought,
it's so much better, all that hanging out, or
the magic and beautiful legs, sex was a fine thing
after all, but my day was spoiled, it would take a night's sleep
anyway, to get rid of the heads. it was terrible to be a human
being: there was so much going
on.

I saw my head in a plateglass window
I saw the reflection
and my head had a cigarette in it
my head looked tired and sad
it was not smiling with its new
haircut.

then
it disappeared
and I walked on
past the houses full of furniture and cats and
dogs and people
and they were lucky and I threw the cigarette
into the gutter
saw it burning on the asphalt

red and white, a tender spit of smoke,
and I decided that the sun
felt good.


he lives in a house with a swimming pool
and says the job is
killing him.
he is 27. I am 44. I can't seem to
get rid of
him. his novel keeps coming
back. "what do you expect me to do?" he screams
"go to New York and pump the hands of the
publishers?"
"no," I tell him, "but quit your job, go into a
small room and do the
ting."
"but I need ASSURANCE, I need something to
go by, some word, some sign!"
"some men did not think that way:
Van Gogh, Wagner---"
"oh hell, Van Gogh had a brother who gave him
paints whenever he
needed them!"

"look," he said, "I'm over at this broad's house today and
this guy walks in. a salesman. you know
how they talk. drove up in this new
car. talked about his vacation. said he went to
Frisco---saw Fidelio up there but forgot who
wrote it. now this guy is 54 years old. so I told him: 'Fidelio is Beethoven's only opera.' and then I told him: 'you're a jerk!' 'whatcha mean?' he asked. 'I mean, you're a jerk, you're 54 years old and you don't know anything!'"

"what happened then?"
"I walked out."

"you mean you left him there with her?"
"yes."

"I can't quit my job," he said. "I always have trouble getting a job. I walk in, they look at me, listen to me talk and they think right away, ah ha! he's too intelligent for this job, he won't stay so there's really no sense in hiring him. now, YOU walk into a place and you don't have any trouble: you look like an old wino, you look like a guy who needs a job and they look at you and they think: ah ha!: now here's a guy who really needs work! if we hire him he'll stay a long time and work HARD!"

"do any of those people," he asks "know you are a writer, that you write poetry?"
"no."
"you never talk about it. not even to me! if I hadn't seen you in that magazine I'd have never known." "that's right." "still, I'd like to tell these people that you are a writer!"
"don't."
"I'd still like to tell them."
"why?"
"well, they talk about you. they think you are just a horseplayer and a drunk."
"I am both of those."
"well, they talk about you. you have odd ways. you travel alone.
I'm the only friend you have."

"yes."
"they talk you down. I'd like to defend you. I'd like to tell them you write poetry."
"leave it alone. I work here like they do. we're all the same."
"well, I'd like to do it for myself then. I want them to know why I travel with you. I speak 7 languages, I know my music---"
"forget it."
"all right, I'll respect your wishes. but there's something else---"
"what?"
"I've been thinking about getting a piano. but then I've been thinking about getting a violin too but I can't make up my mind!"
"buy a piano."
"you think so?"
"yes."

he walks away thinking about it.

I was thinking about it too: I figure he can always come over with his violin and more sad music.
in the featherbeds of grander times
when Kings could call their shots,
I rather imagine on days like this
that concubines were sought,
or the unspoiled genius
or the chopping block.

how about a partridge or a grouse
or a bound behind the merry hounds?
Maybe I'll phone Saroyan in Malibu
or eat a slice of toast ...

the trees shake down September
like dysentery, and churches sit on their
corners and wait, and the streetcars are slow,
and everywhere
birds fly, cats walk, people ruefully
exist ...

the charmers are gone, the armies have put down
their arms, the druid's drunk, the horses have tossed
their dice; there are no fires, the phone won't ring,
the factory's closed, tenesmus, everything ...

I think
even the schizomycetes are sleeping;
I think
the horror of no action is greater
than the scorch of pain; death is the
barker, but things
may get better
yet. I'll use the knives for spreading
jam, and the gas to warm
my greying love.

as the wind breaks in from the sea again
and the land is marred with riot and disorder
be careful with the sabre of choice,
remember
what may have been noble
5 centuries
or even 20 years ago
is now
more often than not
wasted action
your life runs but once,
history has chance after chance
to prove men fools.

be careful, then, I would say,
of any seeming noble
deed
ideal
or action,
be for this country or love or Art,
be not taken by the nearness of the minute
or a beauty or politic
that will wilt like a cut flower;
love, yes, but not as a task of marriage,
and beware bad food and excessive labor;
live in a country, you must,
but love is not an order
either of woman or the land;
take your time; and drink as much as is needed
in order to maintain continuance,
for drink is a form of life
wherein the partaker returns to a new chance
at life; furthermore, I say,
live alone as much as possible;
bear children if it happens

but try not to bear
raising them; engage not in small arguments
of hand or voice
unless your foe seeks the life of your body
or the life of your soul; then,
kill, if necessary; and
when it comes time to die
do not be selfish:
consider it inexpensive
and where you are going:
either a mark of shame or failure
or a call upon sorrow
as the wind breaks in from the sea
and time goes on
flushing your bones with soft peace.


I wait in the white rain for knives like your tongue
I see the spiral clowns fountain up with myths untrue,
I wrestle spasms in the dark on dark stairways
while dollar crazy landladies
are threaded with the hot needles of sperm,
come these morning drunks
brushing away sunlight from the eyes like a web,
come darling, come gloria patri, come luck,
come anything,
this is the hot way---
points sticking in like armadillos
in the rear of a Benedictine mind,
and snow snow snow snow snow
shovel all the snow upon me I can hold,
gingerbread mouth, duck-like dick,
raisins for buttons, thread for heart-strings,
damned waves of blood caught in them
like a minnow in the Tide of Everywhere
I wait in the white rain for knives like your tongue,
and the trucks go by
with bankrupt faces
the steam of their essence like foul sweat
stale stink death in my socks
all the drums of hell
cannot awaken a rhythm within me
I am gone
like an old pale goldfish
dead and stiff as aunt Helen
looking flat-eyed into the center of my brain
and flushed away like any other waste of man,
the man-turd, the breath of life,
and why we don't go mad as roaches, why not more
suicides I'll never know
as I wait in the white rain for knives like your tongue,
I am done, quite; like any ford that cuts off a river

I am done forever and only,
this christ-awful waiting on the end of a stale movie,
everyone screaming for beauty and victory
like children for candy,
my hands open
unamazed hand
unamazed mind
unamazed doorsill
send your flowers to Shakey Joe
or Butternut Carlyle
who might trade them to useful purpose
before everything, everyone,
is dead

The landlord walks up and down the hall
coughing
letting me know he is there,
and I've got to sneak
in the bottles,
I can't walk to the crapper
the lights don't work,
there are holes in the walls from
broken water pipes
and the toilet won't flush,
and the little jackoff
walks up and down
out there
coughing, coughing,
up and down his faded rug
he goes,
and I can't stand it anymore,
I break out,
I GET him
just as he walks by,
"What the hell's wrong?"
he screams,
but it's too late,
my fist is working against the bone;
it's over fast and he falls,
withered and wet;
I get my suitcase and then
I am going down the steps,
and there's his wife in the doorway,
she's ALWAYS IN THE DOORWAY,
they don't have anything to do but
stand in doorways and walk up and down the halls,
"Good morning, Mr. Bukowski," her face is a mole's face
praying for my death, "what---"
and I shove her aside,
she falls down the porch steps and
into a hedge,
I hear the branches breaking
and I see her half-stuck in there
like a blind cow,
and then I am going down the street
with my suitcase,
the sun is fine,
and I begin to think about
the next place where I'm
going to set up, and I hope
I can find some decent humans,
somebody who can treat me
better.

there were several hundred fools
around the goose who broke her leg
trying to decide
what to do
when the guard walked up
and pulled out his cannon
and the issue was finished
except for a woman
who ran out of a hut
claiming he'd killed her pet
but the guard rubbed his straps
and told her
kiss my ass,
take it to the president;
the woman was crying
and I cannot stand tears.

I folded my canvas
and went further down the road:
the bastards had ruined
my landscape.


Bring bring
straight things
like a horse on fire

Ezra said,
write it
soaz a man on th' West Coast'a
Africka culd
understand ut;
and he proceeded to write the Cantos
full of dead languages
newspaper clippings
and love scenes from St. Liz;
bring bring
straight things: in bird-light,
the terror of a mouse,
grass-arms great stone heads;
and reading Canto 90
he put the paper down
Ez did (both their eyes were wet)
and he told her ... "among the greatest love poems
ever written."

Ezra, there are many kinds of traitors
of which
the political are the least,
but self-appraisal of
poetry and love
has proved more fools than
rebels.


1 a lady in pink sits on her porch
2 in tight capris
3 and her ass is a marvelous thing
4 pink and crouched in the sun
5 her ass is a marvelous thing,
6 and now she rises and claps her hands
7 toward the sea
8 and shouts:
9 TIM, TIM, COME BACK, COME BACK
10 HERE! it is a child in a walker
11 running across the cement
12 looking for butterflies
13 and a way out,
14 and she chases him:
15 TIM, TIM, COME BACK HERE!
16 I watch her butt
17 her pink tight magic butt
18 and it rises in my mind
19 like a Beethoven symphony
20 but she is not mine.
21 I have been quietly reading about
22 the 18th century glass harmonica
23 and somebody else will take the pink wobble
24 to direct hand;
25 but
26 really
27 I've seduced her on this Sunday afternoon
28 and I have seen each movement and crawl
29 of pink flesh beneath pink capris,
and she catches her boy in the sun
and he laughs back at her
already a man on the dare
exploring the new front yards of his mind,
and he might resent that I have made love
to his mother this way

as he might resent other things
later
pink red dawn blood bombs
the squealing of sheep
the taxis that ride us out,
or he might put on a necktie
choke out the mind
and become like the rest
therefore
making my pink love
upon these black keys
wasted.

and, I said, you can take your rich aunts and uncles
and grandfathers and fathers
and all their lousy oil
and their seven lakes
and their wild turkey
and buffalo
and the whole state of Texas,
meaning, your crow-blasts
and your Saturday night boardwalks,
and your 2-bit library
and your crooked councilmen
and your pansy artists---
you can take all these
and your weekly newspaper
and your famous tornadoes,
and your filthy floods
and all your yowling cats
and your subscription to Time,
and shove them, baby,
shove them.

I can handle a pick and ax again (I think)
and I can pick up
25 bucks for a 4-roUNDER (maybe);
sure, I'm 38
but a little dye can pinch the gray
out of my hair;
and I can still write a poem (sometimes),
don't forget that, and even if
they don't pay off,
it's better than waiting for death and oil,
and shooting wild turkey,
and waiting for the world
to begin.

[Page 74]

all right, bum, she said,
get out.

what? I said.

gO out. you've thrown your
last tantrum.
I'm tired of your damned tantrums:
you're always acting like a
character in an O'Neill play.

but I'm different, baby,
I can't help
it.

you're different, all right!
God, how different!
don't slam
the door
when you leave.

but, baby, I love your
money!

you never once said
you loved me!

what do you want
a liar or a
lover?

you're neither! out, bum,
out!

... but baby!

go back to O'Neil!

I went to the door,
softly closed it and walked away,
thinking: all they want
is a wooden Indian
to say yes and no
and stand over the fire and
not raise too much hell;
but you're getting to be
an old man, kiddo;
next time play it closer
to the
vest.

---

certainly sought: one quiet time,
the horses of war
shot
with their broken legs,
air sprayed with the languor
of walking through a small neighborhood
at 6 p.m.
to smell pork chops frying,
the arrayed sensibility
of men living through light and sound,
and rain
if there be rain
or snow
if there be snow,
and pain,
living through wives and children
and the sensibility of fire
when it is cold; but
the dogs want a part of us,
they want all of us,
and coming in from the factory
to a bug-infected room
in East Kansas City
is not enough
(but who the enemy is
we are
not quite sure)
only
this morning
combing my hair
one eye on the clock,
wondering if another drink
would do,
I
think
I
saw them.

imbecile night,
corkscrew like a black guitar,
the day was heaving hell,
and now you come
crawling down the drainpipes
crawling down the drainpipes
crawling down the drainpipes
crawling down the drainpipes
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crawling down the drainpipes
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crawling down the drainpipes
crawling down the drainpipes
crawling down the drainpipes

emptying your bladder

all over the place,

and I have drunk 9 bottles of beer,

a pint of vodka,

smoked 18 cigarettes,

and still you sit upon me,

you march the dead out upon

the balcony of my brain;

I see shaven eyebrows; lips, slippers;

my love, in an old robe, curses,

reaches out for me; the

Confederate Army runs; Hitler

turns a handspring ... then

the yowling love of cats

saves me, brings me

back again ... one more drink,

one more smoke, and in the drawer

a picture of a day at the beach

in 1955 ... god, I was young then,
younger anyhow; and at the window,
one or 2 lights, the city is dead
except for thieves and janitors,

and I am almost dead too, so

much gone, and I raise the bottle

in the center of the room

and you are everywhere

black imbecile night,
you are under my fingernails,
in my ears and mouth,

and here we stand,

you and I, a giant and a midget

locked in disorder, and when the

first sun comes down showing the spiders

at work, caterpillars crawling on razor threads,
you will let me go,

but now you crawl into the tomb of my bottle,
you wink at me and posture, the wallpaper is

weak with roses, the spiders dream of
gold-filled flies, and I walk the room again,
light another cigarette, feeling I really

should go mad, but not quite knowing

how.
don't kid yourself:
something kills them all---
finally it becomes a matter of
dying of one thing or
the other---
cancer, a new car, sex, warm
art, poetry, ballet dancing,
a hardware store, smoking grass, peeking
out of windows or
wiping the ass with
cheap toilet
paper

when Christ began
he had the cross in mind
all along.

if I came down off this one
here
it would only be to find a
better one.

meanwhile, sitting with a drink in hand
I know, of course,
what it's all
about, come to the point,
dismiss it, forget it,
hand to mouth
I kid myself a
little.

[Page 80]
that this is the gift
and I am ill with it;
it has sloshed around my bones
and brings me awake to
stare at walls.

musing often leads to madness,
o dog with an
old rag doll.

into and beyond terror.
seriousness will not do,
seriousness is gone:
we must carve from
fresh marble.

hell, jack, this is wise-time:
we must insist on camouflage,
they taught us that;
wine come down through
staring eye,
god coughed alive
through the indistinct smoke
of verse.

the light yellow mamas are gone
the garter high on the leg,
the charm of 18 is 80.
and the kisses,
-snakes darting liquid silver
-have stopped:
-no man lives the magic
long.

until one morning it catches you;
you light the fire,
pour a hasty drink
as the psyche crawls like a mouse

It is always best, of course, to push it in right below the heart. Don't try to hit the bull's eye.  

When seeking damage aim for a large target and strike several times.  

He who pauses is one damn fool.
I remember a discourse with a leper who suggested using hooks and pulleys.

Not so. Not so. He was very bitter.

It is best to go for the eye, smash the cornea, blind him, then strangle him with rope.

My mother suggested an old bathing cap down the throat.

Not so. Not so.

Be safe. Be wise.

Tell him to seek the stars and he will kill himself with climbing.

Tell him about Chatterton. Villon.

Make suggestions. Take your time. He will do it himself.

There is no hurry. Time means nothing to you.

1 my goldfish stares with watery eyes
2 into the hemisphere of my sorrow;
3 upon the thinnest of threads
4 we hang together,
5 hang hang hang
6 in the hangman's noose;
7 I stare into his place and
8 he into mine ...
9 he must have thoughts,
10 can you deny this?
11 he has eyes and hunger
12 and his love too
13 died in January; but he is
14 gold, really gold, and I am grey
15 and it is indecent to search him out,
16 indecent like the burning of peaches
17 or the rape of children,
18 and I turn and look elsewhere,
19 but I know that he is there behind me,
20 one gold goblet of blood,
21 one thing alone
22 hung between the reddest cloud
23 of purgatory
24 and apt. no. 303.

25 god, can it be
26 that we are the same?


1 she was a short one
2 getting fat and she had once been
beautiful and
she drank the wine
she drank the wine in bed and
talked and screamed and cursed at
me
and I told her
please, I need some
sleep.

---sleep? sleep? you son of a
bitch, you never sleep, you
don't need any
sleep!

I buried her one morning early
I carried her down the sides of the Hollywood Hills
brambles and rabbits and rocks
running in front of me
and by the time I'd dug the ditch
and stuck her in
belly down
and put the dirt back on
the sun was up and it was warm
and the flies were lazy and
I could hardly see anything out of my eyes
everything was so
warm and yellow.

I managed to drive home and I got into bed and I
slept for 5 days and 4
nights.

the way I felt, I gave him a quarter,
and then I went up to see the old man
strong as steel girders, fit for bombers and blondes,
up the green rotten steps that housed rats
and past the secretaries showing leg and doing nothing
and the old man sat there looking at me
through two pairs of glasses and a vacation in Paris,
and he said, Kid, I hear you been takin' Marylou out,
and I said, just to dinner, boss,
and he said, just to dinner, eh? you couldn't hold
that broad's pants on with all the rivets on 5th street,
and please remember you are a shipping clerk,
I am the boss here and I pay these broads and I pay you.
yes, sir, I said, and I felt he was going to skip it
but he slid my last check across the desk
and I took it and walked out
past
all the lovely legs, the skirts pulled up to the ass,
Marylou's ass, Ann's ass, Vicki's ass, all of them,
and I went down to the bar
and George said whatya gonna do now,
and I said go to Russia or Hollywood Park,
and I looked up in time to see Marylou come in,
the long thin nose, the delicate face, the lips, the legs,
the breasts, the music, the talk the love the laughing
and she said
I quit when I found out
and the bastard got down on his knees and cried
and kissed the hem of my skirt and offered me money
and I
[Page 87]
walked out
and he blubbered like a baby.
George, I said, another drink, and I put a quarter in
the juke
and the sun came out
and I looked outside in time to see the old bum
with my quarter
and a little more luck
that had turned into a happy wine-bottle,
and a bird even flew by cheep cheep,
right there on Eastside downtown, no kidding,
and the Chinaman came in for a quickie
claiming somebody had stolen a spoon and a coffee cup
and I leaned over and bit Marylou on the ear
and the whole joint rocked with music and freedom
and I decided that Russia was too far away
and Hollywood Park just close enough.

1 There is this long still knife somehow like a
cossack's sword ...

3 and C. writes that Ferlinghetti has written
4 a poem about Castro. well, all the boys
5 are doing poems on Castro now, only
6 Castro's not that good
7 or that bad---just a small horse
8 in a big race.

9 I see this knife on the stove and I move it to
10 the breadboard ...

11 after a while it is time to look around and
12 listen to the engines and wonder if it's
13 raining; after a while writing won't help
14 anymore, and drinking won't help anymore, or
15 even a good piece of ass won't.

16 I see this knife on the breadboard and I move it
to the sink ...

18 this wallpaper here: how many years was it here
19 before I arrived? ... this cigarette in my hand
20 it is like a thing itself, like a donkey walking
21 uphill ... somebody took my candle and candle-
22 holder: a lady with red hair and a white face
23 standing near the closet, saying, "Can I have
24 this? can I really have this?"

25 The edge of the knife is not as sharp as it should
26 be ... but the point, the point fascinates, the way
they grind it down like that---symmetry, real Art, and I pick up this breadknife and walk into the dining room ...

Larsen says we mustn't take ourselves so seriously. Hell, I've been telling him that for 8 years!

There is this full length mirror in the hall. I can see myself in it and I look, at last. It hasn't rained in 175 days and it is as quiet as a sleeping peacock. a friend of mine shoots pool in a hall across from the university where he teaches English, and when he gets tired of that, he drags out a .357 magnum and splits the rocks in half BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! while figuring just where the word will fit real good. In front of the mirror I cut swift circles in the air, dividing sides of light. I am hypnotized, unsettled, embarrassed. my nose is pink, my cheeks are pink, my throat is white, the phone rings like a wall sliding down and I answer "Nothing, no, I'm not doing anything ..."

it is a dull conversation but it is soon over. I walk to the window and open it. the cars go by and a bird turns on the wire and looks at me. I think 3 centuries ahead, of myself dead that long and life seems very odd ... like a crack of light in a buried tomb.

the bird flies away and I walk to the machine and sit down:

Dear Willie:

I got your letter, everything fine here ...

[Page 90]
I drive my car
through a valley
where
(very oddly)
young girls sit on fencerails
showing impartial leg and
haunch
in butterglory sun,
young girls painting
cows and
trees in heat
painting
old farms that sit like
pools of impossibility
on unplanted ground,
ground as still and insane
as the weathervanes
stuck northwest
in the degenerate air;
I drive on
with the girls and their brushes and
their taffy bodies stuck inside my
head like
toothache,
and I get out
much farther down the road
walk into a peeling white cafe
and am handed water in a glass as
thick as a
lip, and
4 people sit
eating,
eyes obsessed with molecules of no
urgency;
I order a veal cutlet and the
waitress walks away
trussed in white flat linen
and I sit and watch and wait
so disattached I wish I could
cry or curse or break the water glass;
instead I pour cream into the
coffee
I think of the girls and the cows,
stir the cream with a damaged and
   apologetic
tinkle
then decide
not to think or feel anymore
that day.

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death wants more death, and its webs are full:
I remember my father's garage, how child-like
I would brush the corpses of flies
from the windows they had thought were escape---
their sticky, ugly, vibrant bodies
shouting like dumb crazy dogs against the glass
only to spin and flit
in that second larger than hell or heaven
onto the edge of the ledge,
and then the spider from his dank hole
nervous and exposed
the puff of body swelling
hanging there
not really quite knowing,
and then knowing---
something sending it down its string,
the wet web,
toward the weak shield of buzzing,
the pulsing;
a last desperate moving hair-leg
there against the glass
there alive in the sun,
spun in white;

and almost like love:
the closing over,
the first hushed spider-sucking:
filling its sack
upon this thing that lived;
crouching there upon its back
drawing its certain blood
as the world goes by outside
and my temples scream
and I hurl the broom against them:
the spider dull with spider-anger

still thinking of its prey
and waving an amazed broken leg;
the fly very still,
a dirty speck stranded to straw;
I shake the killer loose
and he walks lame and peeved
towards some dark corner
but I intercept his dawdling
his crawling like some broken hero,
and the straws smash his legs
now waving
above his head
and looking
looking for the enemy
and somehow valiant,
dying without apparent pain
simply crawling backward
piece by piece
leaving nothing there
until at last the red gut-sack splashes
its secrets,
and I run child-like
with God's anger a step behind,
back to simple sunlight,
wondering
as the world goes by
with curled smile
if anyone else
saw or sensed my crime.

talking of death
is like talking of
money---
we neither know the
price or the
worth,
yet looking down at my hands
I can guess
a little.

man's made for guessing and for
failure
and woman
for the rest.

when the time comes
I hope I can remember
eating a pear.

we are sick now
with so many dead
dogs
skulls
armies
flowers
continents.

there is a fight---

this is it:
against the mechanics
of the thing.

eat a good pear today
so tomorrow

you can
remember
it.

1 in a national magazine of repute
2 (yes, I was reading it)
3 I saw a photograph of lions
4 crossing a street
5 in some village
6 and taking their time;
7 that's the way
8 it should be
9 and some day when
10 they turn out the lights
11 and the whole thing's over,
12 I'll be sitting here
13 in the chalky smoke
14 thinking of those 10 damned
15 (yes, I counted them)
16 lions
17 blocking traffic
18 while the roses bloomed.
19 we all ought to
20 do that
21 now
22 while there's
23 t
24 i
25 m
26 e.


1 lonely as a dry and used orchard
2 spread over the earth
for use and surrender.

shot down like an ex-pug selling
dailies on the corner.

taken by tears like
an aging chorus girl
who has gotten her last check.

a hanky is in order your lord your
worship.

the blackbirds are rough today
like
ingrown toenails
in an overnight
jail---
wine wine whine,
the blackbirds run around and
fly around
harping about
Spanish melodies and bones.

and everywhere is
nowhere---
the dream is as bad as
flapjacks and flat tires:

why do we go on
with our minds and
pockets full of
dust
like a bad boy just out of

school---
you tell
me,
you who were a hero in some
revolution
you who teach children
you who drink with calmness
you who own large homes
and walk in gardens
you who have killed a man and own a
beautiful wife
you tell me
why I am on fire like old dry
garbage.

we might surely have some interesting
correspondence.
it will keep the mailman busy.
and the butterflies and ants and bridges and
cemeteries
the rocket-makers and dogs and garage mechanics
will still go on a
while
until we run out of stamps
and/or
ideas.

don't be ashamed of
anything; I guess God meant it all
like
locks on
doors.

[Bukowski, Charles:A Word on the Quick and Modern Poem-Makers [from The Rooming

it is quite easy to appear modern
while in reality being the biggest damnfool

I know: I have gotten away with some awful stuff
but not nearly such awful pot as I read in the journals;

I have an honesty self-born of whores and hospitals
that will not allow me to pretend to be
something which I am not---

which is a double failure: the failure of people
in poetry
and the failure of people
in life.
and when you fail in poetry
you fail life,
and when you fail life
you were never born
no matter what the statistics
or what your mother named you.

the grandstands are crowded with the dead
screaming for a winner
wanting a number to carry them over
into living,
but it is not as easy as that---
just as with the poem:
if you are dead
you might as well be buried
and throw the typewriter away
and stop fooling with
poems horses women life:
you are cluttering up
the exits---
so get out fast
and desist from the
precious few
pages.


I own the ticks on a horse
I own his belly and balls
I own this
the way his eyes roll
the way he eats hay
and shits and
stands up asleep

he is mine
this machine
like a blue train I used to play with
when my hands were smaller
and my mind better

I own this horse, someday I will ride my horse down all the streets past the trees we will go up the mountain down the valley
ticks and eyes and balls the both of us we will go to where kings eat dandelions in the giant sea where thinking is not terror where eyes do not go out like Saturday night children

the horse I own and the myself I own will become blue and nice and clean again

and I will get off and wait for you.

and you hold the pages up
to the overhead light
and still
nothing comes through.

it is a puzzle indeed,
far more a puzzle than when a 90-to-one shot
leaps through at the last moment
along the rail.

a horse can live.

and, indeed, do you expect to find
poetry
in a poetry review?

things are not that
simple.


I have lain in bed all day
but I have written one poem
and I am up now
looking out the window
and like a novelist might say
drunk: the clouds are coming at me
like scullery maids with dishpans
in their hands---
something that holds gritty dirty
water.
but I am a drunken non-novelist
but in clear condition now
here sits the bottle of beer
and I am warmly thinking
in a kind of foam-shaped idle fancy
working closely
but all I can stoke up are squares and circles which do not fit; so messeigneurs
I will tell you the truth: again (in bed)
I read another article on D. Thomas & some day I will get lucky and sit around
and own a French horn and a tame eagle
and I will sit on the porch all day a white porch always in the sun
one of those white porches with green vines all around, and
I will read about Dylan and D.H. until my eyes fall out of my head for eagle meat and I will play the French horn blind. but even now it gets darker the evening thing into night the bones down here

the stars up there somebody rattling the springs in Denver so another pewker can be born. I think everything is a sheet of sun and the best of everything is myself walking through it wondering about the pure nerve of the life-thing going on: after the jails the hospitals the factories the good dogs the brainless butterflies. but now I am back at the window there is an opera on the radio and a woman sits in a chair to my left saying over and over again: BRATCH BRATSHT BRAATCHT! and she is holding a book in her hand: How to Learn Russian Easily. but there is really nothing you can do easily: live or die or accept fame or money or defeat, it's all hard. the opera says this, the dead birds the dead countries the dead loves the man shot because somebody thought he was an elk the elk shot because somebody thought it was an elk. all the pure nerve of going on
this woman wanting to speak Russian
myself wanting to get drunk
but we need something to eat.
GRIND CAT GRIND MEAT says
the woman in Russian so I figure
she's hungry, we haven't eaten
in a couple of hours. CLAM
BAYONET TURKEY PORK
AND PORK she says, and I walk
over and put on my pants and

I am going out to get something.
the forests are far away and I am
no good with the bow and arrow
and somebody sings on the radio:
"farewell, foolish objects."
and all I can do is walk into a grocery
store and pull out a wallet and hope
that it's loaded. and this is
about how I waste my Sundays.
the rest of the week gets better
because there is somebody telling
me what to do
and although it seems madness
almost everybody is doing it
whatever it is.
so now if you will excuse me
(she is eating an orange now)
I will put on my shoes and shirt
and get out of here----it'll
be better for
all of us.

it will come like a man walking through fire
it will shine like an unseen trumpet in a trunk
the eyes will smell like sausages
the feet will have small propellers
and I will hold you in Bayonne and
the sailors will smile
my heart like something cut away from
cancer will feel and beat again feel
and beat again---but now
the blue evening is cinched like old
muskets and the dangling sex rope hangs
as the tree stands up and calls:
July, the dust of hope in the bottom of paper cups
along with small spiders that have names like ancient
European cities; spit and dross, heavy wheels;
iothewells stuck between fish and sucking up the grey gas
of love and the palms up on the cliff waving
waving in the warm yellow light
as I walk into a drugstore to buy toothpaste,
rubbers, photographs of frogs, a copy of the latest
Consumer Reports (50 cents) for I consume and
am consumed and would like to know
on this blue evening
just which razorblade it would be best for me
to use, or maybe I could get a station wagon or buy a
stereo or a movie camera, say 8mm, under $55
or an electric frying pan ... like the silver head
of some god-thing after they drop the bomb BANG
and the grass gives up and love is a shadow
and love is a fishtail weaving through

threads that seem eyes but are only what's
left of me on the last blue evening after the bands
have suicided out, the carnival has left town and
they've blown up the Y.W.C.A. like a giant balloon and
sent it out to sea full of screaming lovely lonely
girls.
Now it's Borodin ... 4:18 a.m.,
symphony #2,
the gas is on
but the masses still sleep
except the bastard
downstairs
who always has the light on
all night, he yawns all night
and sleeps all day,
his either a madman
or a poet; and has an
ugly wife,
neither of them work
and we pass each other
on the steps (the wife and I)
when we go down
to dump our bottles,
and I look at his name
on the mailbox: Fleg
God. No wonder. A fleg
never sleeps. Some kind
of fish-thing waiting
for a twist in the sky.
but very kind, I must
remember, when the
drunk women up here
scream or throw things
Fleg ignores it all,
yawns, and this is
fine. There used to be
an Anderson, a Chester
Anderson always at my door
in his pants
and undershirt,
red-eyed as a woman

who has lost a lover,
manager behind his shoulder
(and one night 2 cops),
"God, I can't sleep.
I'm a working man,
I've got to get my sleep
Jesus. I can't SLEEP."

Fleg? Sleep? I've never even
seen him. I don't think
he does anything. Just some
kind of shoulder of mutton
with silver eyes
looking up at his ceiling,

tiredly smiling,
saying softly to his
ugly wife: "That Bukowski
up there, he's a kick
for sore balls, ain't he?"

"Now, Honey, don't talk that way."

"He had a colored woman up there
the other night. I can tell,
I can tell."

"Now, Mission, you can't tell no
such damn thing."

(Mission? Mission Fleg. Christ.)

"Yes, I can. I heard her screaming."

"Screaming?"

"Well, moaning, kind of like you
know. What's this guy look like,
baby?"

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"Passed him today. Face kind of smashed
in. A long nose like an ant-eater.
Mouth like a monkey. Kind of funny eyes.
Never saw eyes like those."

It's about 4:38 a.m. Borodin is finished (yeah)
not a very long symphony. I turn my radio down
and the Flegs I find
are listening
to the same station.

I hope we never meet,
I like Fleg the way he is
(in my mind)
and I'm sure he wants me
the way I am
(in his mind),
and he has just yawned now
up through the ceiling
his ceiling
which is my floor; ah,
my poor tired Fleg
waiting for me to give
him LIFE;
he's probably slowly dying of
something
and I am too,
but I'm so glad
he doesn't call the police
while I'm
at it.

this South American up here on a Gugg
walked in with his whore
and she sat on the edge of my bed and
crossed her fine legs
and I kept looking at her legs
and he pulled at his stringy necktie
and I had a hangover
and he asked me
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE AMERICAN
POETS?
and I told him I didn't think very much
of the American poets
and then he went on to ask some other
very dull questions
(as his whore's legs layed along the side of
my brain) like
WELL? YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT ANYTHING
BUT IF YOU WERE TEACHING A CLASS AND ONE OF THE
STUDENTS ASKED YOU WHICH AMERICAN POETS
THEY SHOULD READ
WHAT WOULD YOU TELL THEM?
she crossed her legs as I watched and I thought
I could knock him out with one punch
rape her in 4 minutes
catch a train for L.A.
get off in Arizona and walk off into the desert
and I couldn't tell him that I would never teach
a class
that along with not liking American poetry
that I didn't like American classes either
or the job that they would expect me to
do,
so I said
Whitman, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence's poems about
reptiles and beasts, Auden. and then I

realized that Whitman was the only true American,
that Eliot was not an American somehow and the
others certainly not, and
he knew it too
he knew that I had fucked up
but I made no apologies
thought some more about rape
I almost loved the woman but I knew that when she walked out
that I would never see her again
and we shook hands and the Gugg said
he'd send me the article when it came out
but I knew that he didn't have an article
and he knew it too
and then he said
I will send you some of my poems translated into
English
and I said fine
and I watched them walk out of the place
I watched her highheels clack down the tall
green steps
and then both of them were gone
but I kept remembering her dress sliding all over her
like a second skin
and I was wild with mourning and love and sadness
and being a fool unable to
communicate
anything
and I walked in and finished that beer
cracked another
put on my ragged king's coat
and walked out into the New Orleans street
and that very night
I sat with my friends and acted vile and
the ass
much mouth and villainy
and cruelness
and they never
knew why.

[Page 112]


I take the taxi to Newport and study the wrinkles in the
driver's skull; all anticipation is gone:
defeat has come so often
(like rain)
that it has assumed more meaning
than victory; the player is good at
the piano
and we wait in a corner
(this poet!)
waiting to recite
poems; it's like a cave here:
full of bats and whores
and bodiless music
moving at the back of the world; my head aches,
and seeking a deliberate door
I think gently of successful papa Haydn
rotting in the rainy garden
above copulating
tone-deaf gophers ...

the sun is in a box somewhere
asleep like a cat;
the bats flit, a body
takes my hand (the one with the drink:
The right hand is the drinker)
a woman, a horrible
damned woman,
something alive
sits
and blinks
at me:
Hank, it says,
they want you up
front!
fuck 'em, I say, fuck 'em.

I have grown quite fat and
vulgar (a deliberate death
on the kitchen floor) and
suddenly I laugh
at my excellent condition
like some swine of a businessman
and I don't even feel
like getting up
to piss ...

Angels,
we have grown apart.

I once bought a toy rabbit
at a department store
and now he sits and ponders
me with pink sheer eyes:

He wants golfballs and glass
walls.
I want quiet thunder.

Our disappointment sits between us.

1 the latest sleeping on my pillow catches
2 window lamplight through the mist of alcohol.

3 I was the whelp, the prude who shook when
4 the wind shook blades of grass the eye could see
5 and
6 you were a
7 convent girl watching the nuns shake loose
8 the Las Cruces sand from God's robes

9 you are
10 yesterday's
11 bouquet so sadly
12 raided, I kiss your poor
13 breasts as my hands reach for love
14 in this cheap Hollywood apartment smelling of
15 bread and gas and misery.

16 we move through remembered routes
17 the same old steps smooth with hundreds of
18 feet, 50 loves, 20 years.
19 and we are granted a very small summer, and
20 then it's
21 winter again
22 and you are moving across the floor
23 some heavy awkward thing
24 and the toilet flushes, a dog barks
25 a car door slams ...
26 it's gotten inescapably away, everything,
27 it seems, and I light a cigarette and
28 await the oldest curse
29 of all.

Please keep your icecream hands
for the leopard,
please keep your knees
out of my nuts;
if women must love me
I ask them also
to cook me sauerkraut dinners
and leave me time
for games of gold
in the mind,
and time for sleep
or scratching
or rolling upon my side
like any tired bull
in any tired meadow.

love is not a candle
burning down---
life is,
and love and life are
not the same
or else
love having choice
nobody would ever die.

which means? which means:
let loose a moment
your hand upon my center---
I've done you well
like any scrabby plant
upon a mountain, so
please be kind enough
to die for an hour]
or 2,
or at least

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take time
to turn the sauerkraut.


1 I don't know, it was raining and I had fallen down
2 somewhere but I seemed to have money so it didn't
3 matter, and I went into the opera to dry off, and it
4 was opening night and everybody was dressed and
5 trying
6 to act very polite and educated but I saw a lot of
7 guys there mean as hell, I don't mean mean enough
8 to be
9 a Dillinger but mean enough to be successful in
10 business and their wives were all tone deaf
11 and even the people hollering in the opera
12 were not enjoying it but hollering because it was the
13 thing to do, like wearing bermudas in the summer, and
14 I thought, I'll never write an opera because they'll
15 walk all over it, and I walked out
16 and phoned a gal I knew from South Philly and she met
17 me on Olvera Street and we went into a fancy place
18 and ate and drank and this big female kept